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AG Announces Agreement With Distributor Of Oxycontin

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TALLAHASSEE – Attorney General Bob Butterworth today announced a \$2.15 million agreement with OxyContin distributor Purdue Pharma L.P. to develop a state-of-the-art software program to prevent individuals from "doctor-shopping" for improper narcotics prescriptions.

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Under the terms of the agreement, Purdue will provide \$2 million for development of a software monitoring program designed to detect when improper prescriptions are being issued or Schedule II narcotics are being diverted from their intended purpose. In addition, Purdue will provide \$150,000 for a series of training programs around the state to help Florida law enforcement agencies better understand and address the abuse and diversion of prescription drugs.

Butterworth said Florida is the first state in the nation to reach such an agreement with Purdue. Once the prescription monitoring program is developed, Florida will make the system available at no cost to any

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other state that requests it, Butterworth said. Florida opened an investigation involving OxyContin in 2001 and the agreement announced today marks the end of that investigation, the attorney general said.

"It's easy to lose sight of prescription medications in our fight against drug abuse, but abuse of OxyContin and other prescription narcotics is a significant and growing problem," Butterworth said. "This program creates an ideal partnership between the medical and law enforcement communities that will allow us to track the potential misuse of controlled substances in a way that doesn't invade patient privacy or interfere with doctors' ability to treat their patients."

By using the prescription monitoring program, physicians will be able to determine whether a patient has received an inordinate number of similar prescriptions from other doctors. Butterworth said the practice of "doctor shopping" — patients misleading doctors in order to obtain multiple improper prescriptions — is a widespread form of drug diversion in Florida.

Dr. Zachariah P. Zachariah, chairman of the Florida Board of Medicine, praised the agreement: "As the medical and law enforcement communities know, 99 percent of our physicians carefully and compassionately prescribe pain medications to their patients in dire need. However, a small and irresponsible group of 'pill mill'

practitioners serve as illegal and unethical outlets for drug dealers and their addicted victims. I am delighted with Purdue Pharma's promise to provide \$2 million for the creation of a real time software program that will enable thousands of responsible physicians in Florida to make sure they do not mistakenly prescribe narcotics to a 'doc shopping' drug dealer or addict."

Butterworth and Purdue announced a series of programs for law enforcement officers and agencies to be held around the state in 2003. The program, which will be presented in cooperation with Broward County Sheriff Ken Jenne, was largely designed by law enforcement professionals to help educate criminal justice agencies on the growing threat posed by prescription abuse and diversion.

Jenne noted that this will be the first comprehensive training program of its kind in the nation. "I know Florida's sheriffs and police chiefs will welcome these regional training programs. This program will bring the officer on the street up to speed on what has become the fastest growing substance abuse problem in the United States," he said.

Added Howard R. Udell, executive vice president and general counsel for Purdue: "Illegal trafficking and abuse of prescription drugs raises barriers to the care of patients with serious medical conditions. We commend Attorney General Butterworth for his vision and leadership in addressing these critical public

health issues. These initiatives in Florida can potentially benefit other states and provide real progress in the battle against prescription drug abuse and the protection of the rights of patients to appropriate medical care."

The training seminars for law enforcement are scheduled to be held in Broward County, as well as St. Petersburg, Orlando, Jacksonville and Pensacola.

ATTENTION EDITORS

Attorney General Bob Butterworth, Broward County Sheriff Ken Jenne, Dr. Zachariah P. Zachariah and Purdue Pharma's Howard Udell will be available to the media at 2:15 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1 at the South Florida Regional Office of the Attorney General, 110 SE 6th St., Fort Lauderdale. For directions, call 954-712-4670.